

Neighbourhood Traffic Safety Action Plan

Focus Group Results

**Prepared by Debbie Rawson
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Results of the focus groups undertaken to gather resident feedback on the draft Neighbourhood Traffic Safety Action Plan.

Executive Summary

In Strathcona County, the majority of traffic safety concerns voiced by residents are related to neighbourhood traffic, primarily traffic speeds. The goal of the Neighbourhood Traffic Safety Action Plan (NTSAP) focus groups was to engage residents in a deeper dialogue around neighbourhood traffic safety and the proposed recommendations in the draft of the NTSAP. Engagement was undertaken in order to solidify a vision for neighbourhood traffic safety and to ensure that the final NTSAP recommendations reflect resident priorities and concerns to the greatest extent possible.

In all, 56 residents participated in the focus groups, representing 16 different urban neighbourhoods, two rural hamlets (Ardrossan and South Cooking Lake) and a rural subdivision. This report provides the results of the NTSAP focus groups.

Strathcona County's strategic vision is to be "Canada's Most Livable Community". Defining a livable neighbourhood from a traffic perspective is an important element of the engagement for the development of the NTSAP. Results of these focus groups indicate safety is by far the biggest resident priority in creating a livable neighbourhood. Other prominent themes include Responsible/Respectful and Slow/Calm. There is also a less prominent but significant emphasis on Accessibility.

Focus groups also gathered resident support and opinions on the recommendations put forward in the draft NTSAP, specifically related to traffic calming, enforcement, engagement and playground zones. Residents were also given the opportunity to provide suggestions for initiatives that were not included in the draft plan, and to comment on neighbourhood traffic safety generally.

Feedback gathered from these focus groups will be used to finalize the NTSAP. The final NTSAP is planned to be presented to County Council in the first quarter of 2017.

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background

In Strathcona County, the majority of traffic safety concerns voiced by residents are related to neighbourhood traffic, primarily traffic speeds. The need for a Neighbourhood Traffic Safety Strategy was first identified in the County's 2008 Traffic Safety Strategic Plan. In April 2013, Strathcona County adopted SER-009-040 Traffic Calming, and in January 2014, a Neighbourhood Traffic Safety Strategy.

While there has been some success in the implementation of these two initiatives and safety records on residential roads are strong, resident concerns with neighbourhood traffic safety have remained essentially unchanged. Traffic concerns in Strathcona County neighbourhoods are addressed through the "Five E's": engineering, enforcement, education, evaluation and engagement. The Neighbourhood Traffic Safety Action Plan (NTSAP) is being developed to define key actions we can take in these areas to improve the safety and livability of Strathcona County's residential areas while at the same time making the best use of municipal resources.

In June 2016, a draft of the new NTSAP was presented to Council. This plan was created based on results of the 2013 and 2015 Traffic Safety Surveys, history of resident concerns, lessons learned in previous traffic calming initiatives, as well as best practice in residential traffic safety. The draft NTSAP proposed 11 recommendations.

Engagement for the NTSAP is being undertaken at the Listen and Learn level. The goal of the NTSAP focus groups was to engage residents in a deeper dialogue around neighbourhood traffic safety and the proposed recommendations in the draft of the NTSAP. Engagement was undertaken in order to solidify a vision for neighbourhood traffic safety and to ensure that the final NTSAP recommendations reflect resident priorities and concerns to the greatest extent possible.

1.2 What this report provides

This report provides the results of the NTSAP focus groups. A total of four focus groups were held in October and November 2016. Participants were provided with a draft copy of the NTSAP including the recommendations for action. This report summarizes the feedback from the focus groups and will be used to inform the final NTSAP.

1.3 Recruitment and participation in the focus groups

Residents of Strathcona County were all provided with an opportunity to participate in the focus groups through the implementation of a detailed communication plan to recruit focus group participants. The opportunity to participate in the focus groups was advertised through direct email to over 1900 residents, through the County's Public Engagement e- newsletter and contacts collected through previous Traffic Safety Surveys. The focus groups were also promoted through the Community Living Advisory Committee and Councilor newsletters. The opportunity to participate was advertised through a media release, which resulted in an article about the groups, as well as through a traditional advertisement in the Sherwood Park News. Facebook was also used to promote the event, as well as a banner on the County webpage. Rural residents were specifically targeted through the Rural Contact

Offices and Community Leagues. All County staff who are also County residents were also given the opportunity to participate in a specific staff focus group.

In all, 56 residents participated in the focus groups, representing 16 different urban neighbourhoods, two rural hamlets (Ardrossan and South Cooking Lake) and a rural subdivision. Residents who expressed interest in the focus groups were asked to complete an application to participate to enable focus groups to be chosen to represent a diversity of age, location of residence and opinions. In the end, all residents who applied were able to be accommodated in the groups.

1.4 Methodology

Thirteen staff participated in the first focus group that was used to trial the process. Following this focus group, the questions and process were refined. As a result, only some staff responses could be compiled with the public focus groups.

The Poll Everywhere application was used to gather resident feedback and display the results in a real-time format. Other questions were open-ended and discussions were facilitated by table facilitators. Participants were also provided with a paper questionnaire to add any additional comments they wanted to add to group discussions or poll questions. Input was summarized and analyzed for themes.

2.0 Results

2.1 What are your biggest concerns with traffic in your neighbourhood?

Similar to the two Traffic Safety Surveys undertaken in 2013 and 2015, driver behaviour, most commonly speeding, was the most cited residential traffic safety concern. Other behaviours, such as distracted driving, U-turns, and general disrespect and non-compliance with traffic laws were also reported as concerns. Other common but less cited concerns included traffic volumes and sightline issues due to vegetation and parking. All of these concerns were often related back to pedestrian safety concerns, with many residents specifically concerned about the safety of children on the streets.

A handful of participants felt lack of residential enforcement was a concern. Two residents reported traffic noise as one of their three biggest concerns with traffic. Poor cyclist behaviour was also mentioned by one participant.

2.2 What one word would you use to describe a liveable neighbourhood from a traffic perspective?

Strathcona County's strategic vision is to be "Canada's Most Livable Community". Defining a liveable neighbourhood from a traffic perspective is an important element of the engagement for the development of the NTSAP. The "wordle" below summarizes focus group participant responses. The wordles give greater prominence to words that appear more frequently.

Figure 1: Wordle of focus group participant responses to the question: “What one word would you use to describe a livable neighbourhood from a traffic perspective?”



It is clear from the wordle that safety is by far the biggest resident priority in creating a livable neighbourhood. Other prominent themes include Responsible/Respectful and Slow/Calm. There is also a less prominent but significant emphasis on Accessibility.

Participants were also given the opportunity to expand their thoughts on a livable neighbourhood by putting their thoughts on a poster available at each session. Responses included:

“A neighbourhood that is safe for pedestrians both young and old.”

“Traffic that moves efficiently and safely through neighbourhoods that allow pedestrians to have confidence when crossing higher volume roads.”

“Motorists that respect the speed limits and traffic laws so others are safe to use sidewalks and crosswalks.”

“Appropriate speed limits (40 km/h).”

2.3 Traffic Calming

Participants were given some background on how traffic calming is currently undertaken in the County, as well as some of the challenges related to its implementation (cost, complex process, difficulty coordinating with rehabilitation schedules).

Participants were then asked their opinion on the following recommendation:

“In conjunction with scheduled rehabilitation, upgrade pedestrian facilities at all Heritage Trail crossings, schools and key pedestrian corridors to include physical traffic calming features.”

95% of participants indicated that they supported this recommendation.

Comments regarding this recommendation:

“Would make sense to align rehabilitation schedule and high needs traffic safety areas. I.e. Waiting 8 years to implement traffic safety measures doesn't make sense. What is the priority for implementation? Road condition shouldn't drive addressing traffic safety measures.”

“Will we continue to over-engineer our traffic safety initiatives? Let's get to work on community engagement (eg. Community Talk) and enforcement as supplementary measures”

“Impact of traffic calming physical devices that hinder snow removal (negative impact)”

“I don't see it as a total solution. Enforcement is still a requirement in my opinion.”

Participants were then asked their opinion on the following recommendation:

“Implement traffic calming at all schools in conjunction with regularly-scheduled rehabilitation, as appropriate, to manage speeding and parking concerns.”

84% of participants indicated that they supported this recommendation.

Comments regarding this recommendation:

“Education starting with school kids."Stop" "look both ways" "listen" "look" "Proceed if Safe". Work with AMA. Pedestrian education is sorely lacking.”

“Would want more information on how much input and power a school (or school board) has when wanting to implement traffic calming measures versus what is recommended by the surrounding community.”

“My concern is that when addressing traffic calming around school areas, I strongly feel that the community should be included and allowed to voice concerns that impact their neighbourhood. I am discouraged to hear that school boards are given priority. I believe it should be a discussion between all parties involved. We live it every day.”

“I support this but can see that those who "drive" for a living would find fault and it could be politically and visually a negative initiative.”

“May not need to include high schools.”

“Along with signs to bring down speeds.”

“Most elementary schools have playgrounds. Playground 30 km/h signage would be more appropriate than school zone signs as children are there before and after school, evenings and summer.”

2.4 Enforcement

Participants were given a short presentation of the results of the Traffic Safety Survey, which indicated that enforcement-related solutions were the most supported to address residential speeding concerns.

The policing dilemma was also discussed: the police goal is to reduce death and injury, but the demand for enforcement is mainly in residential areas, where there are very few serious collisions.

Participants were then asked the question:

“When enforcing in residential areas, what infractions should be given the highest priority for policing?”

In all focus groups, speed was ranked as the number one priority for enforcement (2/3 of participants rated it as the top priority). In the public focus groups, distracted driving was ranked as the second highest priority, and stop sign enforcement as the third highest priority. Parking was consistently ranked in the groups as the fourth priority. Noisy vehicle enforcement was consistently ranked as a low priority with 62% of participants rating it fifth.

The following results were obtained when participants were the asked the question:

“Is the current allocation of policing resources between residential areas and the arterial network appropriate?”

49%- No- more resources should be taken from policing arterial roads and put into policing residential roads.

45%- Yes- the current allocation of police resources seems about right.

6%- No- more resources should be taken from policing residential roads and put into policing arterial roads.

Participants were then asked:

“What are some acceptable solutions for Strathcona County to meet the demand for residential policing?” (within an existing budget)

Participants texted suggestions which appeared in real-time on the presentation screen. Then participants broke out into table groups to discuss “Which of these suggestions seem most reasonable to you?” See Appendix for a complete list of the enforcement-related comments from the focus groups.

The most common texted suggestion was to bring back photo radar. This suggestion came up repeatedly in the urban and staff focus groups (15 times in total), with one other text saying “No Photo Radar”. In table discussions, many participants saw photo radar as a good solution; however, there were some participants who were opposed to using automated enforcement. In deeper discussion, most of these participants supported the use of photo radar with caveats, ie. “in residential areas only” or “if the revenue goes back into the neighbourhoods”. A few participants did not support its use in any context.

Several texted solutions indicated there should be increased resources for residential enforcement. Some of these suggestions proposed reallocation of funds from other areas or raising taxes, but many of them did not indicate how this resourcing should be funded.

Other texts suggested police resources should be used differently. Many of these suggested residents be more involved in enforcement, such as “Have "Report a Texted" like we have Report a Drunk. If you're able to video them in action with license plate, cops will give ticket. This would free cops up to do speed enforcement.” “Allocate more enforcement for problematic drivers” was another suggestion.

One participant suggested that police resources are not used effectively as response is not at an appropriate time to address the issue: “note the times of specific complaints and put enforcement there at those times not so long after the complaint is logged”. Another suggested that better use of data collected by Speed Watch could help police be more effective.

A few suggested that police may need to work on community relations: “Is reluctance of residents to report problems to RCMP a factor?” One participant went as far as to suggest “Bring in EPS and get rid of RCMP”. Another suggestion was to “Assign officers to neighbourhoods as liaison officers”. Better police communication to neighbourhoods was also suggested: “More community communications such as newsletter”.

Other suggestions focused on making greater use of other traffic safety initiatives to decrease the need for enforcement, such as education (driver feedback signs, Speed Watch, “Educate pedestrians”) and engagement (“Empower citizens to publish issues to local media and/or County personnel”). There were a few participants who suggested that lowering the residential speed limit would help: “people will go 50 instead of 60”.

A few residents suggested that residential traffic concerns are common and that the County should “Look at innovative solutions in other jurisdictions”. One participant suggested “Park old/retired police cars in residential areas”.

2.5 Playground Zones

Participants were given a short background presentation regarding the difference between a playground area and zone. Most participants were unaware of this difference. They were also provided with information on how speed limits in playground zones are set and how that process has evolved over time, resulting in inconsistency in our community.

Participants were then asked:

“What should the County do to improve speed limit consistency at playgrounds? Rank these options from the one you support the most to the one you support the least.”

Participants were given three response options:

- 1. Remove unwarranted zones after the playground zone has been traffic calmed (with rehab)*
- 2. Remove unwarranted zones immediately*

3. Leave things as they are

Participants most strongly supported the first option of removing unwarranted playground zones after the zone had been traffic calmed over the second option of removing the unwarranted zones immediately by a margin of approximately 2:1. The third option was ranked the lowest and received much less support than the other options.

A few participants indicated that they did not feel the option they wanted was included in the list. Some felt that the option of marking all playground areas at 30 km/h should have been included.

Three participants provided comments about this question:

“Playgrounds/schools- please simplify. Drivers have a hard enough time following rules, don't give them more to think about. Playground zones = 30 km/h (no advisory signs), school zones = 30 km/h 8-4!”

“What is the criteria used to post for playground zones? Ie. McGhan park. What is the standard? Is there a standard?”

“Consistent signs regardless of "calming" and increase all fences to 6 feet if the fences are expected to keep children safely on one side.”

This question was asked as an open ended question at the staff focus group. In addition to all of the options provided above, several participants suggested to “make all residential roads 40 km/h including all playgrounds”.

2.6 Engagement

Participants were given a short introduction to the concept of resident engagement for residential traffic safety, including some examples, such as the Pace Car program. Participants were then engaged in table discussions to answer the following question:

“How can we better engage Strathcona County residents in residential traffic safety?”

For the most part, participants tended to make suggestions that still involved County staff taking a leadership role and more closely related to education, such as:

“Use mobile library to promote traffic safety”

“Use buses for traffic safety messaging”

“Safety rodeos for young drivers”

“Outreach to schools- have high schools go to elementary schools”

“CALM classes in high school”

Several participants referred to the need for formal community infrastructure in the County as a backbone to facilitate engagement:

“forming community leagues- free space for them to meet. Community centre be part of the development process, community coordinators to help set up and maintain community leagues.”

“If you want community engagement and more community groups, there needs to be a neighbourhood coordinator position within the County”.

During the rural focus group, it was noted that rural areas are already better equipped to engage residents in traffic safety due to the presence of community leagues, and that these organizations should be leveraged.

One participant also noted how mediation services are available to help neighbours who are in conflict, as is often the case in residential traffic issues. This is also a resource that could be promoted.

Another theme was the need to identify community leaders who could promote safety in the neighbourhood:

“County will engage with resident leaders to provide education, promo items, discounts on signage (GOKAB, kids with a flag). This will help residents be involved and engaged. Resident led facebook page to stay connected and get to know your neighbours. Also allows County a way to liaise with residents.”

2.7 General Comments

One of the resounding themes of the focus groups was the feeling that the NTSAP needed to give more value to the importance of ensuring residents felt safe in their neighbourhood, and less focused on statistics. One resident received resounding support when he commented to the group that: “It appeared that public perception (feeling of lack of safety) was completely dismissed in favour of cold hard facts”.

Several other comments centred around school traffic safety, including a request to post school zone effective signs and a concern that school zone effective times do not mirror school peak times. There were also some participants who were specifically concerned about the new school to be built in Davidson Creek:

“In the case of Davidson Creek school (new) implement the calming before the school is built rather than after incidents occur. Consider other intersections on the route to the new school. Clarkdale Meadows for example should also be considered when making traffic calming decisions.”

One participant commented that “Sherwood Park is "carcentric". People will drive regardless so some way to engage drivers and gain buy in so that safe driving becomes a culture- not an exception”.

2.8 Anything you think should be covered in the Action Plan that isn't?

Participants were given the opportunity to suggest actions that they believed were missing from the draft of the NTSAP. Comments aligned with the following themes:

Evaluation- the most common suggestion was to include more evaluation metrics in the plan.

“What is working of the current initiatives? The measurement and evaluation of these help identify where to focus resources for the biggest impact on the goal- a safe, livable neighbourhood.”

Education- several suggestions were made related to the need to continue to educate in our neighbourhoods, particularly with regards to speeding (greater use of driver feedback and other signage) and pedestrian education. These comments included:

“Program to buy at a discount "safe playing" signs”

“Education. Much of the issue is "perception" driven not fact driven”

Better Use of Data- a few participants commented that better use could be made of data to improve safety

“Better collision information: date/time of collision, road conditions”

“Will COP Speed Watch Data (about 5 years) be incorporated in current database?”

The "feeling" of safety. Resident complaints, stats on "near misses"

“Collecting data and information from local fire/EMS services. SCES responds to all motor vehicle collisions and transport all injured patients to hospital. As well, we offer patient assessment for all occupants. By involving SCES, would that help along with the police with traffic data and solutions?”

More comparable information to challenges and successes in similar towns/communities.

“What are their best practices? How could we learn (and implement) their ideas.”

Distracted driving

“I didn't hear any reference to distracted driving behaviour as a growing traffic safety problem.”

Other single comments

How will NTSAP define the proportionate importance and/or implementation of the 5 E's?

How will the NTSAP be integrated with Community Talk initiative?

We should have something in place to reward the good drivers

Drop speed to 40- if they are 10 over it's 50- perfect. 50 and 10 over is 60. We want 50.

3.0 Evaluation of the Focus Groups

Using the Poll Everywhere application, participants were asked to text one word that would describe the focus group session. Figure 2 shows the Wordle of the results.

A few other comments regarding the focus groups themselves were received from participants. These included:

“Late-in-the-process”

“Good start for a difficult subject”

“Not sure anything is going to change...sorry...”

“More engagement forums prior to the drafting of the NTSAP”

“Survey questions leading. At times I did not want to choose any of the answers”

Figure 2: Evaluation Wordle



4.0 Conclusion

4.1 Next Steps

Feedback gathered from these focus groups will be used to finalize the NTSAP. The final NTSAP is planned to be presented to County Council in the first quarter of 2017.

Appendix- Resident Comments

Enforcement

Texted suggestions to: "What are some acceptable solutions for Strathcona County to meet the demand for residential policing?" (within an existing budget) (Arranged by theme)

More investment in policing- reallocate

- Reallocate Tax Money
- Change in budget priorities towards enforcement

More investment in policing- raise taxes

- Raise taxes
- Are you willing to pay more taxes for residential policing?
- Higher Taxes
- Raise taxes
- Raise taxes

More investment in policing- Source of investment not specified

- Monitor stop sign infractions.
- Hire more county enforcement folks and provide more consistent signage....
- Police presence in the residential neighbors.
- More enforcement in residential areas, monitoring speed, stop sign infractions etc
- More police interaction/engagement
- More "boots on the ground".
- continue with random speed checks,
- Random policing in neighbourhoods
- More patrolling of the neighbourhoods on a random basis
- Regular police patrol through neighborhoods on a random basis.
- more bicycle and on foot enforcement
- Skip education and enforce

Change how policing is done

- Resourcing options and alternative solutions
- Police engagement with the community concerns
- Empower citizens to report violations and enforcement responds accordingly (phone call, letter, personal visit - escalate response with frequency of violations)
- Resident initiated traffic monitoring and reporting of significant infractions, with the aid of speed monitoring apps, video capture, velocity recording devices etc.

- Have "Report a Texted" like we have Report a Drunk. IF you're able to video them in action with licence plate, cops will give ticket. This would free cops up to do speed enforcement.
- use volunteer speed surveys to identify problem areas for enforcement to act on
- Surprise physical presence!
- note the times of specific complaints and put enforcement there at those times not so long after the complaint is logged

Automated Enforcement

- Neighbourhood photo radar
- Photo Radar
- Photo radar
- Bring back photo Radar
- Photo radar
- Bring back photo radar.
- Photo radar
- No photo radar
- dynamic photo radar
- Photo radar
- Photo Radar
- Photo radar moved frequently, on all roads in Sherwood Park.
- Implement widespread photo radar, manned and unmanned. Intersection cameras to capture red light and stop sign violations.
- Photo radar
- Photo radar brought back to S.C.
- Photo radar

Use of other "E"s

- Education programs to reduce enforcement requirements
- Speed feedback devices
- Community engagement
- Live speed displays mounted on lampstandards.
- feedback signs
- speed watch
- Speed Watch
- Neighbourhood watch
- Signs indicating how far from corner one can park. Curb extensions taking into account whether motorists can see past the parked cars.
- School traffic monitors, flashing lights,
- Involvement of residents similar to block watch
- Empower citizens to publish issues to local media and/or County personnel

- Education
- Volunteer traffic calming

Learn from others

- Work with the province
- What do neighbouring municipalities do?
- Talk to other munis this is not an uncommon problem
- Look at innovative solutions in other jurisdictions

Reduce speed limits

- Reduce speed limits - offenders would have increase in fines

Higher fines

- High Fines, very high\$\$\$\$
- Increased fines
- Increase fines for violators.
- increased fines

Flipchart Notes from Facilitated Discussions (not organized): “Which of these suggestions seem most reasonable to you?”

- Lower speed limits- people will go 50 instead of 60
- Learn from other jurisdictions
- Look at Neighbourhood Specific solutions
- Photo radar- just for residential streets
- Move photo radar to arterials and more officers into residential areas
- Assign officers to neighbourhoods as liaison officers
- Allocate more enforcement for problematic drivers
- Increase visibility in neighbourhoods with manned enforcement
- Police should communicate what they have done in neighbourhoods ie. Tickets, speed ops
- Don't agree with photo radar
- Highlight problem areas in the newspaper
- Support photo radar if the revenue can go back into the neighbourhoods
- only residential photo radar
- more laser enforcement
- more speed watch
- no photo radar
- photo radar fixed with warning signs
- police visibility
- marked cars in school zones

- Driver Feedback Signs
- More volunteers or more paid enforcement
- More speed watch- enforcement to issue letters
- Confidential reporting
- Connect to Community Talk
- Resident Direct enforcement (record plate, description of offense, sent for police enforcement)
- Police/CPO higher visibility in neighbourhood
- More manned enforcement
- More community communications such as newsletter
- Educate pedestrians
- Change onus to pedestrian
- Park police vehicles in neighbourhoods
- increase fines
- photo radar
- drop speed limits to 40 km/h
- enforce distracted driving
- Ensure timing is right- if complaint is at 4pm don't come out at 1pm
- Add a web based complaint line that is directed to policing
- increase fines
- reintroduce photo radar
- Is reluctance of residents to report problems to RCMP a factor? (Police community relations issue)
- Bring in EPS and get rid of RCMP
- Low level speeding is not a blanket 10 km over the speed limit. It depends on the original speed. 10 km over at 100 is different than 10 km over at 30.